

Good evening members of the committee.

Tonight, I not only represent myself but the spirits of those fathers that were not able to represent themselves tonight, whether they knew they needed to be here or not.

My life has three sides: I am a junior in the Human Development and Family Studies program at the University of Connecticut, a military veteran of the Groton Subbase, but first and foremost I am a single father to a beautiful six year old girl. Being a father, that alone influences every choice I make in my life. When I applied to UConn, I originally wanted to be a music teacher, but it was the guiding light of the fatherhood programs in Connecticut that changed my passion to family advocacy, specifically the hopes to work with the Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut.

With the proposed budget, not only are what little programs Connecticut has for fathers being eradicated, but it also destroys the opportunities that for many fathers, including myself, have been life changing. I, as well as other advocates, will also not have those opportunities to educate and assist fathers as they pursue a connection with their children.

The data is all there. I had an amazing opportunity last semester to investigate numerous studies on fatherhood not only along the life course but in multiple scenarios. Incarcerated, military, gay couples, the data screams the same message: "DADS ARE IMPORTANT," and when given a positive opportunity, we not only improve their lives, but also the lives of their children.

These small and underfunded programs have created an addiction in this state. Fathers are hungry for knowledge on how to connect with their children on levels they never thought they could achieve before. We have started tipping the scales to equality between fathers and mothers in the lives of our children, but this will not last long without the support of the state government making fatherhood a priority.

When I was unemployed after the military, I called several women's shelters, women and children play groups and single parent groups hoping to find the support and encouragement I needed. The results were being cast aside because it is apparently impossible for a father to raise a child alone, let alone a little girl. I even had a single mother report me to DCF for singing to my child and they opened an investigation because of it. Thankfully, that became a blessing in disguise and I was then able to get involved with Madonna Place in Norwich and the Fatherhood Initiative. Unfortunately, now men in similar positions will not have those same resources that helped me in my time of need.

I refuse to budge on the issue. I will continue to fight for the equality fathers deserve when it comes to services in Connecticut. Although we are scattered, we stand together for fathers everywhere. The question is, will you be our ally and help create a better future for our children or will you cast us aside and allow history to continue repeating itself.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

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